

## THE PRESENT CONDITION OF INDIA

checks and traditions which tended to limit births, but these have tended to disappear.

As to natural conditions, climate and the like, we cannot say that the peasant is absolutely dependent on the goodwill of the rain god! From early days artificial irrigation has been known in India. The average rainfall in India is 37 in.—more than enough—but a report on irrigation calculated that more than 35 per cent, of rainwater goes back to the sea. But 84 per cent, of the total area cultivated is not artificially irrigated. In some provinces ancient "tanks" have been allowed to fall into disrepair. Though Ceylon is not India, I may be allowed to refer to the *dry* area of that island. It forms a striking contrast to the vivid green of the rest of the island. I was amazed at the aridity of this district, but in ancient times it was most fertile. With the new emphasis on plantations the tanks were neglected, fell into disrepair and the desert of to-day is the result.

Much has been said of the peasants<sup>5</sup> extravagance. It is a precarious argument. It is true that much money is spent on weddings and *melas* (religious fairs), but is it to be wondered at? The life of the Kisan is one of bitter drudgery and these events come as an oasis in the desert. We cannot blame the peasant for occasionally escaping from the miseries of his life. The social customs which give him sanction come down from a happier age when the barns were full of grain and the cattle were plentiful.

It is hard to shake off old habits and the peasant is generally conservative, but we cannot ask him to change his ways, unless we give him some alternative means of recreation, and these might well prove more costly in the long run. The Banking Enquiry of 1931, in its Committees, concluded that the picture of the peasants' extravagance was overdrawn. "Social and religious customs make but a small contribution to the total indebtedness."